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the information, and my teaching benefited from this relaxation of unnecessarily harsh authority.

The policy of free choice of topics evoked divided reactions from students. I had the impression that independent choice of topics improved the writing of many students, but I may have been biased by my own liking for student-centered teaching or by the opinions of many teachers who have reported that students write better about subjects they're interested in. With almost half the class preferring to have topics assigned, I need to ask myself if the free choice policy is really helping their writing or just making some of them more anxious. It would be valuable to find a way to test the effects of free choice more objectively, a goal that I hope can be applied in future classes. Immediately, it might be helpful to some students to offer choices of a number of topics for each assignment, including "any other topic you like." At least none of them would have to worry about the whether the topic they chose would offend the teacher.

The wide range of English writing skills and the generally low level of most students' writing will probably be duplicated in future classes, so I will need to work out ways to challenge students who are at higher levels and not leave out those who are behind. One strategy might be to offer a series of assignments of varying difficulty for each of the five required writing projects. The first assignment, which everyone would have to do, would be the basic paragraph: descriptive, narrative, etc. Additional assignments involving more difficulty—perhaps by use of specific grammatical forms or by longer length or by a type of organization other than those usually used for this genre—could be done for extra credit.

The action research has motivated me to keep closer track of student reactions to my innovations than I might have otherwise, and I have learned quite a bit about which strategies have worked best—and worst. The exercise of writing a report on the results of the action research, as I am doing here, has had the benefit of forcing me to think through my reactions and conclusions once again, as well as seeing them from the outside, as through the eyes of another reader. As a result, I see clearly that I need to validate my results with objective measures of some kind.

to get them from me, reinforced by the readings. A third process method that failed was the attempt at collaborative learning through peer review. The problem here was the low skill levels of most of the students; they had little to suggest to each other. Because of the morale-building effects of collaborative learning, as well as the communicative benefits of an audience, other forms of peer response should be found, such as, perhaps as Williams (2005) identifies it, is to have pairs of students write questions and answers about their personal information to each other.

On the other hand, some process innovations seemed quite successful. I felt that not correcting the students' learning logs supported the growth of fluency and confidence in writing English, which were among the purposes of the logs. Thus I plan to keep the policy of not correcting the logs in future classes. The learning logs themselves were another process success. They were helpful to me in maintaining communication with the students, many of whom had difficulty at first in asking questions or expressing doubts—or any opinions—in class. I feel it would be wise to continue the practice for this reason, as well as for the benefits to fluency and confidence. The logs helped to teach the students they would not be penalized for questioning the value of the process approach or other aspects of the class, and that in fact I was interested in their reactions, negative or positive. Also, I suspect, the logs helped some students think through their own ideas, as well as express them. While some respect for authority is natural and unavoidable in the classroom, students should also be encouraged to think for themselves, and particularly in writing classes.

Another process element that I felt was beneficial was lecturing about the process approach. A majority of students seemed to have some understanding of the importance of learning to think reflectively and finding their voices through writing. These insights may improve their Arabic writing immediately, and their English writing more gradually, but in any case, these ideas seemed too important to withhold from students learning to write. Still another process innovation that was an outstanding success was telling the students how grades were calculated. The students were happy with

vocabulary as a major constraint in trying to find a personal voice in English. Many were also concerned by what they saw as insufficient past instruction in English, and I am inclined to agree with both judgments.

*Effects of peer review of assigned papers.* Peer review was one of the topics that evoked the most comments in the learning logs. About 4/5 of the students who commented found it an empty exercise, and in fact I have to agree. A few students were able to be genuinely helpful to their peers, but most pairs of reviewers were fairly equal in their great lack of knowledge. (If the review groups had been enlarged to include one better writer in most of them, I would not have been able to figure out how the others were doing, in any group that had had one of the good writers in it. In a group of two, I am more likely to receive feedback from each.) Perhaps collaboration can be introduced in other ways, or in more advanced classes.

*Effects of explaining the criteria for grading to the students.* Almost all students expressed strong enthusiasm for this innovation, orally or in writing, and I don't believe that any disliked it. I would have done this even if I had not been introducing process approaches into the classes, because it seemed to me the students had a right to know how they were being graded.

## *Discussion*

Some of the criticisms of process methods in the genre literature are supported by my experiences in introducing process methods to these classes. For example, actually finding their voices in English writing was beyond the capabilities of almost all of my EFL students, owing to limited vocabularies and general lack of familiarity with English. Another realization was that completely failing to correct students' grammar and spelling or failing to instruct students in organization, vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical devices useful for different general types of genre (description, exposition etc.) would have been unthinkable, and in fact I did not attempt it. These students would be unlikely to pick up new English vocabulary or rhetorical devices from their surrounding Arab culture, so they needed

assignment, to describe a place, was acceptable and gave the writer sufficient freedom. The most difficult topic to choose was the narrative from their own experiences, (although quite a number of lively paragraphs resulted), perhaps because of the complexity of an interesting, suspenseful narrative structure. One student explained in her log:

To describe the place with nice adjectives, mainly if the place means a lot to us, seems to be easier than writing a narrative paragraph . . . To look or see a nice story is hard . .

These days I am walking around with eyes wide open and try to find a story which is right.

The reasons for the free-choice policy were explained and discussed in my lectures and in dialogues with students in their logs and face-to-face. It was my impression that many students were becoming aware that free writing on topics of personal interest to them improved their writing.

*Effects of the lectures on process writing.* About half of the students discussed learning how to write reflectively and how to find one's personal voice in their learning logs. Many seemed to be internalizing the information they were receiving from lectures. One student had this insight:

I formed a general opinion about learning and speaking a language. Somehow it came to my mind that learning, and especially using a language which is not one's first language, is about . . . acting or playing a role. I think this is because I have noticed that other people use a totally different voice in English, and a different style when writing, than in Arabic . . . I am doing it too, but I don't know . . . when I'm writing in English, my style becomes a bit stilted or unnatural . . . because I can't decide how to express what I want to say.

A number of other students commented on having a different voice in Arabic and in English, due to lack of English vocabulary and because they found English to be more formal. They often saw lack of

Another student wrote on the questionnaire, "Our first serious writing task was the final exam when graduating from high school at the age of 18, which is quite late." One reason for this frequent neglect of writing in high school English classes may have been that the teachers were still focusing on vocabulary, spelling, and grammar deficiencies that seemed more crucial than writing. The introduction of English into the Kuwaiti elementary curriculum may now be allowing more time for students to develop pre-writing knowledge and skills.

*Effects of the learning logs.* The students used the learning logs for different purposes. Most took advantage of this opportunity for private communication to complain (one asked for more quizzes), clarify, ask questions, or assess the pros and cons of the process approach. A number also included little anecdotes about themselves and their lives. Only a few commented on their attitudes toward having to write the logs, but these all reported that journaling had given them more confidence in their writing in other situations, including the formal graded assignments. Some students, however, were so unaccustomed to, or adverse to, this type of teacher-student communication that they simply summarized what occurred in the lesson or in the readings for that particular day. It is possible that for these students, the learning logs actually created more stress instead of less, although they still provided more practice in writing English. I myself found the logs extremely useful in monitoring student reactions, because they submitted questions and opinions in their logs they might not have brought up in class. Students who first communicated through their journals later took the initiative in expressing opinions in class or orally outside of class.

*Effects of freedom to choose topics.* Most students commented in their logs on having to choose their own topics for the five major writing assignments. They were fairly evenly divided between those who tended to like the policy, which they felt made the task of composing simpler or more interesting, and those who tended to dislike it as an extra burden. Some students may have seen pitfalls in making a choice the teacher might not like. "Please, please give us a subject!" one student wrote in her log. Most said that the first



5. Discussions were incorporated into the lectures about the process approach, independent thought and discussion, and finding one's own feelings, attitudes, and voice through writing. This was done so that students would understand the purposes of their journaling and choice of individual topics. In addition, the usual lecture topics were retained: English paragraph structure (topic sentence, main idea, supporting ideas, examples, conclusion sentence); alternative ways of organizing the types of paragraph (description, narrative, compare/contrast, etc.) so that students could choose between different organizations of these assignments; and common mistakes in spelling, vocabulary, and grammar. The readings, which modeled different types of organization (different "genres"), were not changed.

### *Results*

The results confirmed my expectation of a wide range of previous experience, from, at one extreme, a few students who had attended all-English private schools, and at the other extreme, an unfortunate student who had not been required to do writing in high school because her teacher knew she did not speak English at home. The great majority of students had studied English for twelve years, in public elementary, middle and high schools. They could speak English fairly fluently if not always correctly, but they were not able to write effectively. The quotations that follow from students' logs, questionnaires, and writing assignments have therefore been corrected for spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and style.

Most of the students reported that writing had not been emphasized in the public school curriculum. One student wrote:

I'm know the important of writing. Unfortunately my teachers in high school did not give too many writing, so it's time for me to learn how to say about myself correctly in the written language. Sometimes I feel not good when I realize that I understand English book or film but I cannot be able to write these sentences by myself. (learning log)

sense of collaborative learning, reducing fear of the teacher and of failure. I retained the practice of carefully correcting these written assignments for accuracy and sometimes style, although this is apparently not always done in process classes. Many of the students were not writing at a level at which I felt I could dispense with this essential teaching, and they were not immersed in an English language culture in which corrections would often be supplied by their environment.

4. Students were informed of the criteria for grading as shown in the table below for each writing skill, a practice they were unfamiliar with, and another attempt to make the teacher's authority less intimidating.

Writing Skill	Actual Score	Maximum Score ( 2 )
Title		2
Topic sentence		2
Supporting sentences		2
Conclusion		2
Grammar		2
Vocabulary		2
Punctuation marks		2
Cohesion		2
Unity		2
Spelling		2

1. Throughout both semesters, I assigned a learning log (a journal), and required the students to make entries (in English) at least every week, not a usual practice in writing classes at the college. Additional entries were occasionally written in class. There were no assigned topics; rather, I instructed the students to address concerns about their writing, the class readings, the curriculum, the class lectures, and anything else related to academic writing. Whenever I felt it was necessary and appropriate, I addressed their concerns, either by writing in their journals or orally in class. I told the students that the logs should exhibit informal, journal-type writing and that they would not be graded on mechanics or accuracy. To receive full credit for each log, they had to fill a minimum of one A4-size sheet with writing each week. The logs were collected, responded to, and graded weekly. The purpose of these logs was to give the students experience at writing in English about their own concerns and opinions, without anxiety about correctness, so as to make them more comfortable writing English. The log was also intended to provide me with feedback about students' concerns and reactions to the course.
2. Students were given considerable choice in the topics of all five major writing assignments required during the semester, another departure from the usual practice at the college. The curriculum dictated that the students complete descriptive, narrative, comparison/contrast, process analysis, and classification paragraphs in the two semesters. Beyond that, I limited the scope only of the first two assignments. The students were asked to write about a place in the descriptive paragraph, and to write about their personal experience in the narrative paragraph.
3. Before handing in their five major writing assignments, the students were separated into pairs, and each one was asked to review the other's paper, also not a usual practice. The purpose of this was to give more authority to students and to create a

Grossman, eds., 2008). I chose this approach rather than a scientific experimental approach because this project was driven mainly by my interest in improving the class and learning how to meet the students' needs, and because I wanted to try out a number of innovations, rather than limiting the changes to one experimental variable. The project was aimed at answering several of my concerns. One was that I had no clue about the needs of these students, except for a strong suspicion that the classes were had multiple skill levels, but I hoped that elements of the process method, especially free writing in journals, would open up stronger communication with them. Another concern was the students' typical lack of pleasure in writing, and perhaps even fear of it, which I hoped the process approach would help to ameliorate. I hoped that the effects of these changes, especially the higher morale and greater interest in communication, would strengthen the more traditional methods used in the class to improve the students' writing ability.

So, on the first day of class each semester, I conducted an open-ended needs assessment and also had the students fill out a questionnaire dealing with their previous instruction in English and in writing (both in English and in Arabic). The questionnaire was developed as a way to collect further information from the students on the topics also addressed in the learning logs, such as their degree of experience writing English and their attitudes toward it. Therefore, in this paper, we will explore the following questions:

1. How does the language teacher get learners to express themselves in writing?
2. How does the language teacher get the students to see learning writing in— second/foreign language—as an activity in which they must move themselves, to find their own best way to learn, rather than to wait and be told (or pushed) by the teacher?
3. How should the language teacher encourage an individual student to develop and become self-motivated in his/her writing?

Introducing the process approach to this writing class chiefly involved five innovations:

practitioners are returning to something closer to traditional preprocess writing, with its greater emphasis on correctness and its use of descriptive, narrative, expository, compare/contrast, and classification genres to teach grammar and rhetoric. It seems likely, in fact, that this historical pendulum has swung back and forth more than once. The process method grew out of the move toward individualism and away from respect for authority of the '60s (Atkinson, 2003; Cheng, A., 2008; Weissburg, 2006), but there is also an older tradition, "progressive education," that has many of the same ideals of self-education, reciprocal education by peers, and freedom from authority. This movement was most popular in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but never became the predominant style of teaching in any country, and was apparently influenced by still earlier 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophers and educators (Graham, P.A., 1967; Kohn, 2008). At the same time, the method of teaching facts and formulas first and encouraging creativity later has continued to be followed in many classrooms, doubtless throughout centuries. Few ideas in education are really new, and teachers have perhaps always been experimenting to find the best balance between structure and freedom in their classes, as I have been doing here.

### *The Action-Research Project*

This past year, I decided to introduce elements of the process approach into my two-semester (Fall & Spring 2009/2010) freshman English writing classes. This basic writing class is a compulsory course that covers one of the English language skills students have to pass once they have been admitted to the English department. For the two semesters, the two writing courses contained a total of 70 women between the ages of 18 and 23 years and were required for all English education majors at the College of Basic Education, the undergraduate training college for Kuwaiti elementary school teachers. Even at the elementary level, all teachers in Kuwait teach specialized subjects—there are no generalist home-room teachers—and my English majors were preparing to teach English to elementary school children.

The project was structured as action research (Fleischer, 1995; McNiff, Lomax, & Whitehead, 1996; see also articles in Hui &

motivation. The emphasis on writing on topics of the student's choice and on reflective writing that deepens the student's self-understanding should free the student to pursue her personal interests and express her own opinions. This in turn should increase her enjoyment of writing and motivate her to communicate more effectively. A large body of research has in fact found that writing quality tends to improve when students have the freedom to choose their own topics. Furthermore, a number of features of the process method tend to de-emphasize the teacher's authority, including personal choice of topics, peer review of writing, and emphasis on ideas and expression rather than on accuracy, which may dissipate the resentment of adult authority that some young people feel. Process-based teaching often neglects to correct errors in order to avoid discouraging students, putting off accuracy until fluency and confidence have been achieved, which should make writing in a foreign language a less fearful undertaking (Cheng, A., 2008; Hudelson, 1989; Ivanic & Simpson, 1992; Rivers & Temperley, 1978; Silva, 1997; Tchudi & Mitchell, 1989).

In the present EFL writing climate, process writing is not usually hailed as a new solution to old problems. It may surprise some teachers to learn that the process approach was not universally adopted in EFL writing during the '70s and '80s, when it spread widely in L2 teaching. In fact, some of the objections to process writing that have been raised by proponents of the genre method, themselves often EFL teachers, have proven to be stumbling blocks to introducing the process approach into EFL writing in the first place. These arguments include the view that self-correction, peer review, expression of feelings and values, and finding an individual voice through writing are not appropriate or helpful to students with limited English and little access to English-speaking culture. Extensive knowledge of English must be acquired before students can learn to write through writing, or write effectively in their own voices (Cheng, 2008; Holliday, 1994; Hyland, 2004; Ivanic & Simpson, 1992; Liu & Hansen, 2002; ).

It is ironic that in proposing to introduce more structured teaching, including formulas and rhetorical devices that can be learned without great familiarity with English-language culture, the genre

classroom: “For tomorrow, I want you to write four paragraphs comparing and contrasting Romeo and Juliet with Hamlet.” If a student happens to know nothing about this topic, she has very little time to become an expert. Even when the topic is highly accessible, my experience suggests that if it is assigned to the entire class, they will not approach the task with eagerness. On the contrary, if students are allowed to choose their own topics—for instance, an exploration of Princess Diana’s life or the history of Hip Hop music—their motivation to communicate may be far more intense. Young people bubble over with ideas and experiences they want to share with one another and with adults, and yet, when given a formal writing assignment, they often claim they have nothing to say.

*The Relevance of the Process Method to this Problem*

*Process Approach* to teaching writing is not really to dissociate writing entirely from the written product and to merely lead students through the various stages of the writing process but ‘to construct process-oriented writing instruction that will affect performance’ (Hyland, 2002, p. 25). To have an effective performance-oriented teaching program would mean that we need to systematically teach students problem-solving skills connected with the writing process that will enable them to realize specific goals at each stage of the composing process. Thus, process writing in the classroom may be construed as a program of instruction by incorporating the four basic writing stages — planning, drafting (writing), revising (redrafting) and editing — and three other stages externally imposed on students by the teacher; namely, responding (sharing), evaluating and post-writing and as a result it helps the students understand the nature of writing at every point (Richards & Renandya, 2008, p. 315).

Process writing in the classroom is highly structured as it necessitates the *orderly* teaching of process skills, and thus it may not, at least initially, give way to a free variation of writing stages cited earlier. Teachers often plan appropriate classroom activities that support the learning of specific writing skills at every stage. Process writing seems to offer several antidotes to these problems of

language, as well as the beginning speaker and reader. A writer who does not have that will be uncertain about what she is doing (Williams, 2005).

A third handicap for my Kuwaiti teacher trainees is that most do not expect to make much use of English writing skills in teaching English to their elementary school students or, in fact, in any other part of their future lives, although they are expected to acquire writing skills to be certified. Thus the method of teaching specific genres that students expect to use in social situations in their later lives—formal job application letters, informal letters to friends, advertising copy, a medical log kept by a nurse (Hyland, 2004)—would probably not supply much motivation to these students.

Of course, writing is creative and, like all creative efforts, requires energy and time. Few writers are able to dash off something in final form, and most of us find writing rather a struggle. Furthermore, in writing, people put something of their soul down for close scrutiny by others; there can be a feeling of exposure in writing, especially if the audience is sharply critical. But there are many processes in a young person's life that require complex skills, an investment of time, or public exposure: mounting a butterfly, mastering a bicycle, playing football, painting a picture, being in a play. Writing differs in many ways from these activities, but there seems to be no reason why students should find the single task of composing so difficult.

One other explanation for the reluctance to write is that foreign language writing, in contrast to the activities mentioned above, takes place only in the schoolroom for most students, and some of the distrust and fear young people feel may come from previous classroom writing experiences. Under the traditional method of teaching EFL that my students are accustomed to, product is still strongly emphasized at the expenses of process. Students may open up their souls in writing only to have the teacher focus on their grammar and spelling errors. Sheer quantity and speed of output, as opposed to content, are also considered important in preparing students for school-leaving and college essays. Essay topics are sometimes dull and uninviting, as, for instance, an assignment heard in a U.S.



Introducing the Process Approach into a Traditional (Preprocess) EFL Writing Classroom: an Action-Research Project

*The Problem of Motivation in EFL Writing*

It is well-known that school and college EFL female teachers prefer teaching literature to teaching composition, and that the place of writing in the EFL curriculum is not always particularly secure. Even the most dedicated teachers have times when they would agree with one of my students, struggling with English, who confided to her journal, "I hate wrighting"(sic)—to which many in our profession might reply, "I hate teaching writing, too!"

As a teacher of English and teacher trainees at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait (CBE), I have been interested in understanding the causes of the unpopularity of writing. One reason is surely the well-known difference in difficulty and complexity between writing a language and reading or speaking it. As Vygotsky (1962) points out, almost all children learn to express themselves effectively in speech at about the same age, but many people never learn to express themselves freely in writing. Even with careful instruction, there is a considerable lag between expressive speech and expressive writing in one's native language and also in a second language. Vygotsky (1962) suggests that the difficulty of learning writing compared with that of learning speech is of the same order as the difficulty of learning algebra compared with learning arithmetic.

Another reason is probably discomfort with a foreign language. My Arabic-speaking Kuwaiti students neither hear nor read much English outside their English classes and thus, unlike ESL students in English-speaking academic environments, they cannot draw on a wide store of implicit knowledge of English when they write. Vygotsky (1962) regards spoken language as the key tool in the development of all cognitive skills, but especially literary skills, although some ESL and EFL teachers note that writing skill can also be based largely on reading input (Greene, 1993; Haas, 1993; Hyland, 2004). In any case, it is widely accepted that heavy input of some kind from a foreign language is invaluable for the beginning writer in that

# مقدمة على ممارسة الكتابة الحرة

## د/ سلوى الدرويش

### الملخص

بينما كانت الباحثة تدرس مقرر الكتابة لطلبة يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وفي نفس الوقت متدربين ليصبحوا معلمين للغة الإنجليزية، قامت بإجراء هذا البحث العملي لكي تستطيع تفهم احتياجات الطلبة الفردية وبالتالي مساعدتهم على العثور على أصواتهم فيما يكتبون والتعبير عن آرائهم الفردية. ويتموحر جوهر هذه الدراسة التي تعتمد على الأسلوب الإجرائي في الكتابة على إعطاء مساحة كبيرة من الحرية للطلبة في إختيار المواضيع التي يكتبون فيها وعلى ممارسة الكتابة الحرة التي لا تخضع للتصحيح فيما يتعلق بتقنيات الكتابة والدقة، وقد انتهى هذا البحث إلى أن جميع الطلبة كانوا مقتنعين بأن الكتابة الحرة ساعدتهم في اتقان الوظائف الكتابية الأخرى، فقد أظهرت التعليقات في كتاباتهم الحرة بأن العديد منهم كان مدركاً لأهمية تطوير الصوت الفردي في الكتابة وبهذا الكتابة بثقة أكبر، وقد رأى بعض منهم بأن أن تلك الحرية في اختيار المواضيع التي لم يعتادوا عليها في مقررات أخرى كانت مصدر تشويش لهم ولم يستطيعوا الاستفادة من تلك الميزة. وترى الباحثة بأن هذا الأسلوب كان مفيداً للطلبة وعلى هذا سوف نتبناه كجزء من تدريسها لمقرر الكتابة.

# **Introducing the Process Approach into a Traditional (Preprocess) EFL Writing Classroom: an Action-Research Project**

## **Dr. Salwa Al-Darwish**

### **Abstract**

Recently, teaching a writing class of EFL teacher trainees with an unusually wide range of skills, the researcher conducted a classroom-based action research project to help her better understand individual students' needs and also help them find their voices. The core of the study, based on the process approach to writing, was to allow great freedom in the choice of topics and additionally to require regular free writing that was not graded on mechanics or accuracy. Virtually all the students believed that the free writing helped them in other writing assignments. Comments in their free writing suggested that many were becoming aware of the importance of developing a personal voice and writing with confidence. Some also found the unaccustomed freedom to choose topics disturbing and did not take full advantage of it. The researcher feels that this approach was helpful to the students and it has become part of her writing pedagogy.